FROM THE DIRECTORS

Founded in 2003 through generous funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Center for Religion and Media has now completed six years of research, public programming, outreach and conversation at the nexus of religious life and media engagements. The time of transition from Pew funding to “stand-alone” status with the support of a generous endowment from NYU has seen the Center continue its mission.

The past year's theme, “Culture, Religion and the Politics of Change” allowed us to carry on work that recognized the extraordinary transformation of American politics heralded by Barack Obama's election in the fall of 2008. Distinguished lecturer Melanie McAlister of George Washington University spoke on “What would Jesus do now? Evangelicals, the Iraq war and the Struggle for Position,” analyzing how the debates about the war, in various media, shaped the evangelical vote in November. Another view of the Iraq War was given to us by the film Lioness, a documentary about five women in the military sent to Iraq. The experimental documentary Zero Degrees of Separation by Canadian filmmaker and activist Elle Flanders, looks at the Middle East conflict and the Palestinian Occupation through the eyes of mixed Palestinian and Israeli gay and lesbian couples, and the filmmaker's own family history. Jeff Sharlet, former editor of the Center's webzine, therevealer.org, gave a reading from his extraordinary book, The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power. In the past few months, his knowledge of this small but powerful group of politicians and business elite gained national attention as crucial to understanding the first year of resistance to Democratic domination of DC politics.

Viewing “politics” as wider than the electoral variety, in spring the Center hosted a screening and roundtable on “Devoted to Discipline: religion, education and punishment in prison.” After viewing the powerful documentary The Dhamma Brothers: East meets West in the Deep South, we asked: Do religious practices and education programs simply make prisoners docile, or are they moral lifelines for a politics of personal change?

The Center saw a year of ever-deepening collaboration on campus: “Reel China, the 4th documentary Biennial” marked a high point in our continuing collaboration with Cinema Studies; we teamed with the Kevorkian Center for several screenings, bringing filmmakers and audiences together to discuss some of the most pressing issues in the political cultures of the Middle Eastern Islamic and Jewish world. The Spring was brought to a close with a brilliant Distinguished Lecture based on his just-published book Jews, God and Videotape, by scholar Jeffrey Shandler (Rutgers), one of the co-founders of our working group on Jews/Media/Religion.

This year, 2009 –2010, the Center is working around “Memory, Media and Cultural Creativity,” returning us to some of our most basic themes: how, in times of economic and environmental crises, people still rejuvenate themselves and create political and religious transformation through creative engagements in various media: painting, ritual, film and video, all allow for personal and collective opportunities for change. We opened Fall 2009 by collaborating with NYU’s Grey Art Gallery with programming that amplified a spectacular show of Aboriginal paintings from Australia’s central desert based on their longstanding cosmological traditions, Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya. We are happy to announce that spring 2010 will bring a workshop on “Digital Religion: Transforming Knowledge and Practice,” funded by a generous grant from the Henry M. Luce Foundation. Please watch for announcements and join us to learn more about these exciting new directions at the Center.

Faye Ginsburg and Angela Zito
NYU Global Distinguished Professor

Patricia Spyer (Leiden University) begins her second year as a Global Distinguished Professor at NYU in January 2010, pursuing several areas of scholarly investigation, including religion and violence, historical consciousness, the media and photography, and materiality and religion. Among her published articles this year are “In and Out of the Picture: Photography, Ritual, and Modernity in Aru, Indonesia,” which was included in Photographies East: The Camera and its Histories in East and Southeast Asia (ed. Rosalind C. Morris). Also, her most recent article “What Ends with the End of Anthropology?” is part of an edited volume under consideration with UC Press.

Spyer will be co-teaching a course with NYU Anthropology department chair Fred Myers in Spring 2010 on “Anxieties of Circulation” and currently has two books in progress: Images That Move, co-edited with Mary Steedly (under contract with SAR) and Orphaned Landscapes, which explores the role of mass and small media in the violence and post-violence of the Moluccan conflict in Indonesia.

Visiting Scholars for 2009–10

We are pleased to welcome Oren Golan (Hebrew University), recipient of a Fulbright grant to conduct research on Jewish religious representation on Israeli and American websites. In addition, Patricia Spyer (University of Leiden) will continue her work with CRM as an NYU Global Distinguished Professor.

Jane Anderson

As a joint visiting scholar with The Center for Religion and Media and Visiting Scholar in the Institute for Law and Society, Anderson continued her work on intellectual property law and Indigenous knowledge/traditional knowledge issues. This year Anderson’s book, Law, Knowledge, Culture: The Production of Indigenous Knowledge in Intellectual Property Law was published by Edward Elgar Press in the UK. In addition, she continued as an Expert Consultant for the World Intellectual Property Organization. At WIPO Anderson develops frameworks to extend Indigenous people’s and communities’ capacity to make informed decisions about knowledge management, control, access and use, and intellectual property law.


Anderson is also working as part of the Research Team on Intellectual Property in Cultural Heritage Project: Theory, Practice, Policy, Ethics, a project funded by SSHRC in Canada and located at Simon Fraser University, Canada.
Jeremy Stolow (Concordia University)
During his fellowship at the CRM in the autumn of 2008, Stolow spent most of his time hunting down archival sources related to spiritualism and technology at the New York Public Library and the New York Historical Society where, among other riches, he found two remarkable early Spiritualist newspapers: the *Spiritual Telegraph* and the *Herald of Progress*. He is currently writing “The Spiritual Nervous System,” which deals with the interconnected notions of telegraphic communication and nervous sensibility within the Spiritualist imaginary which will appear as a chapter in a book he is editing, “Deus in Machina: Essays on Religion and Technology in Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspective,” (forthcoming from Fordham University Press). He is also working with Carly Machado (at the State University of Rio de Janeiro) on a co-authored text on the history of the seance table in transnational perspective. CRM joins Stolow in looking forward to the release of his book, *Orthodox By Design: Judaism, Print Politics, and the ArtScroll Revolution* (University of California Press, forthcoming in the spring of 2010), the conclusion of a long-standing project supported by the CRM during his first fellowship in 2003–2004.

Elizabeth Castelli (Barnard College)
Elizabeth A. Castelli spent Fall 2009 at the Center, working on Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini’s script for his never-produced film about Saint Paul. She gave a paper, “Pasolini and Political Theology: The Unmade San Paolo,” based on this work, in the Critical Theory and Biblical Interpretation Section at the International Society of Biblical Literature Meeting in Rome, Italy, July 2009. She also gave the keynote address, “Beyond Late Antiquity: Christian Martyrs and their Cultural Afterlives,” at Passages from Antiquity to the Middle Ages Conference IV: Religion, Society and Participation, held at the University of Tampere, Finland, 20 August 2009. Her review of Lars von Trier’s 2009 film, *Anti-Christ*, appears in the October 2009 issue of *Artforum* and online at http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=23734

### SCREENING SERIES

**September 11, 2008**
**ZERO DEGREES OF SEPARATION**

**Elle Flanders (2005)**
This award-winning documentary looks at the Mideast conflict and Palestinian Occupation through the eyes of mixed Palestinian and Israeli gay and lesbian couples, interwoven with the filmmaker’s story of her grandparents’ involvement in the founding of the state of Israel. A discussion with the filmmaker Elle Flanders, film subject Samira and Macky Alston (Director, Auburn Media) followed the screening.

**September 19, 2008**
**LIONESS**

**Meg McLagan and Daria Sommers (2008)**
The stories of five women in the US military, sent to Iraq to defuse tensions with local civilians, only to face unintended consequences. Dubbed “Team Lioness”, they faced counterinsurgency battles in Iraq and more long term challenges at home. A discussion with the filmmakers Meg McLagen and Daria Sommers followed the screening.

**February 6, 2009**
**IN SEARCH OF BENE ISRAEL**

**Sadia Shepard (2008)**
Documentary filmmaker and writer Sadia Shepard grew up in the US with a Muslim mother, Christian father and Jewish grandmother. In 2001 she journeyed to India to connect with her grandmother’s Indian Jewish community. This film-and her acclaimed 2008 book, *The Girl from Foreign: A Search for Shipwrecked Ancestors, Forgotten Histories, and A Sense of Home*—offer an account of what she discovered. A discussion and reading with the filmmaker Sadia Shepard followed the screening.

**February 27, 2009**
**A JIHAD FOR LOVE**

**Parvez Sharma (2007)**
Muslim gay filmmaker Parvez Sharma filmed in twelve countries and nine languages, often in nations where government permission to make this film was not an option. A discussion with the filmmaker Parvez Sharma and Gayatri Gopinath (Director, NYU Gender and Sexuality Studies) followed the screening.
The Reel China Documentary Festival is an independent film festival that presents the most outstanding contemporary documentaries produced in China. Participating filmmakers range from more experienced professional documentarians to young novices. As their disparate visions extend and overlap, we witness the persistent presence of independent cameras that, amidst the disorienting transformation in China, assures the discovery and documentation of fragments of contemporary reality that are becoming history at breakneck speed.

The Center for Religion and Media, along with co-sponsoring Cinema Studies, welcomed Chinese scholars and filmmakers for the 2008 Documentary Biennial. The festival opened on Friday, October 17th with introductions by CRM co-directors Angela Zito and Faye Ginsburg and NYU cinema studies professor Zhang Zhen followed by a screening of the film Bing Ai, directed by Feng Yan. The screening was followed by a discussion with scholar and critic Cui Weiping and a roundtable on documentary in China today with Jonathan Kahana (Cinema Studies), Lu Xinyu (Fudan University, Shanghai), Angela Zito (CRM), moderated by Zhang Zhen (Cinema Studies), joined by several visiting filmmakers. The second day of the festival featured the films: Growing Up (Chengzhang) directed by Li Youjie, We Are the Children of Communism (Women shi gongchan zhuyi shengluehao) directed by Cui Zi’en, My Dear (Qin ai de) directed by Gu Yaping, Though I Am Gone (Wo sui si qu) directed by Hu Jie. Screenings were followed by discussions with the filmmakers Cui Zi’en and Gu Yaping. The afternoon ended with a roundtable with filmmaker Hu Jie, joined by Zhu Rikun (curator and critic) and Rebecca Karl (EAS/History).

The following Friday, October 24th, the festival continued with the films: Have Meal When You Have To (Gai chifan, chifan) directed by Gao Yanfei & Wu Yifei and introduced by Angela Zito, That Winter, This Summer (Nanian dongitan, jinnian xiatian) directed by Yang Huazhou, Wuding River (Wu Ding He) directed by Li Xiaofeng & Jia Kai, Golden Lotus — The Legacy of Bound Feet (Zhong Guo Jin Lian) directed by Joanne Cheng and Taishi Village (Taishi Cun) directed by Ai Xiaoming and introduced by Zhang Zhen (Cinema Studies). On Saturday October 25th, the festival concluded with the films: The Road (Lu) directed by Jia Ding, Torch Troupes (Hua Ba Ju Tuan) directed Xu Xin, Faith (Xin Xin) directed by Wei Xueqi and Idle People in Society (Xianzhe) directed by Zhang Weijie. These screenings were introduced by Zhang Zhen, Angela Zito and Richard Allen and were followed by a closing roundtable with Hao Jian (scholar and critic), Cui Weiping (Scholar and critic), and Xudong Zhang (EAS), moderated by Angela Zito.
SCREENING / ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

March 6, 2009

DEVOTED TO DISCIPLINE: RELIGION, EDUCATION AND PUNISHMENT IN PRISON

The Dhamma Brothers: East Meets West in the Deep South (Jenny Phillips, Anne Marie Stein, Andrew Kukura, 2008; 76 min.) documents a 10-day meditation retreat held in an Alabama men’s maximum-security prison which makes a decisive difference in several lives. In March, filmmaker Jenny Phillips visited NYU’s Center for Religion and Media for a post screening discussion. The screening and discussion was followed by a roundtable discussion with Tanya Erzen (OSU), an anthropologist researching the role of faith-based initiatives in southern prisons, and Daniel Karpowitz (Bard), a lawyer and academic director of the Bard Prison Initiative in New York state. Moderated by CRM co-director Angela Zito (NYU), the roundtable explored the paradoxes of discipline as religion, college education and punishment in American prisons. The panelists addressed the questions: Do religious practices and education programs simply serve the punitive regime of the prison, rendering inmates manageable? Or are they the lifeline for moral integrity and dignity of the individuals who live inside?
Working Group on Jews, Media, and Religion Highlights

Barbara Kirschblatt-Kimblett (NYU) and Jeffrey Shandler (Rutgers), have continued to lead the working group, a vibrant component to the Center for Religion and Media, exploring the intersection of Jewish life and media through various trajectories: the role of media in Jewish religious practices, the advantages or challenges new media poses to religious life, and the effects of media engagement on Jewish community and religiosity. In the spring, Shandler gave a distinguished lecture on his recently published book *Jews, God and Videotape: Religion and Media in America* (NYU Press). Last year, the working group brought together scholars from around the world for the following seminars:

**Friday, November 14, 2008**
**PRAYERBOOKS, COOKBOOKS, SELF-HELP BOOKS: Designing an Orthodox Life in the Case of ArtScroll Publications**
The Center for Religion and Media, NYU
Jeremy Stolow, Concordia

**Friday, December 5, 2008**
**RECOVERING THE PAST in Nina Levitt’s multimedia documentary installation about Jewish women spies during World War II**
The Center for Religion and Media, NYU
Shelley Hornstein, York University

**Friday, January 16, 2009**
**ETHEL RAIM AND THE CENTER FOR TRADITIONAL MUSIC AND DANCE: Three Decades of Showcasing Jewish Music**
Center for Jewish History
Co-sponsored event with The Jewish Music Forum
Ethel Raim and Professor Mark Slobin (Wesleyan University)

**Friday, January 23, 2009**
**DISCUSSION OF THE DOCUMENTARY: A ROAD TO MECCA: The Journey of Muhammad Asad**
The Center for Religion and Media, NYU
Filmmaker George Misch

**Friday, May 1, 2009**
**THE PARTICIPATING OBSERVER: Fieldwork in Jewish Settings**
Center for Jewish History
Co-sponsored event with The Jewish Music Forum
Rabbi Jeffrey A. Summit (Tufts University)
Respondent:
Dr. Henry Goldschmidt (Wesleyan University)

In addition, the Working Group continues to produce Modiya, an online archiving and pedagogical project: http://modiya.nyu.edu/ where they have completed the first installment of “Teaching à la Modiya,” which offers strategies and multi-media primary sources for teaching selected readings related to cultural practices at the intersection of Jews, media, and religion. Each installment brings students into direct contact with the primary sources upon which a given reading is based. This research-centered pedagogy aims to inspire and prepare students to undertake primary research of their own and help them to read more analytically and confidently. Inspired by Teaching the Journal of American History (http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org), each installment includes a reading, commentary by the author, and exercises using primary sources (artifacts, photographs, film clips, audio, excerpts from a variety of texts), as well as recommended further texts and links to relevant materials accessible online. The first installment is dedicated to “Absolut Tchotchke,” Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture (University of California Press, 2005). http://modiya.nyu/handle/1964/917

(New York University’s Humanities Council and Center for Religion and Media provided the initial funding for developing “Teaching à la Modiya,” which extends the scope of the JWG’s prize-winning website Modiya.)

And finally, work continues on the co-edited volume “Mediating Anne Frank” under contract with Indiana University Press. The articles featured in the volume draw on the working group’s 2005 colloquium.
DISTINGUISHED LECTURES
October 30, 2008
WHAT WOULD JESUS DO NOW? Evangelicals, the Iraq war, and the Struggle for Position
Melani McAlister (George Washington University)
This talk explored Evangelical debates over the Iraq war in media and popular culture, sermons and songs and the policy recommendations of religious think tanks. The divisions among them over US foreign policy was though likely to have significant impact on the evangelical vote in November 2008.

April 23, 2009
JEWS, GOD, AND VIDEO TAPE: Religion and Media in America
Jeffrey Shandler (Rutgers University)
From cantors’ early sound recordings to contemporary Hasidic outreach on the Internet, American Jews have become much more than the “people of the book” during the past century. Drawing on his lively new book, Jews, God, and Videotape (NYU Press), Shandler argued that such engagements with media of all kinds have become central to defining contemporary religiosity not only for Jews but more broadly.

BOOK TALK
October 24, 2008
THE FAMILY: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power
Jeff Sharlet
The story of how a small but powerful group shaped the faith of the nation in the 20th century and drives the politics of empire in the 21st century, reshaping our understandings of “fundamentalism.” Reading with author Jeff Sharlet was followed by a conversation with Heather Hendershot (Queens College and CUNY Graduate Center).

LECTURE/SCREENING
February 13, 2009
FEMALE TROUBLE: Women’s Representation in Iranian Cinema
Hamid Naficy (Northwestern)
A leading scholar on exilic and diasporic cinema and media, Naficy examined the ideological work surrounding the filmic representation of women and their participation as filmmakers in this new era of Iranian cinema. The lecture was followed by a screening of Under the Skin of the City (Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, 2004; 92 min.) and a post-screening discussion with Naficy.

SYMPOSIUM
September 26, 2008
CULTURAL CONVERSIONS: Religion, Gender, and Latino/a America
This interdisciplinary event explored how the performance and politics of Latino/a religious identity is transformed by dissident embodiments of gender and sexuality.

CRM IN THE NEWS: Jeff Sharlet
Congratulations to CRM associate and Revealer founding editor Jeff Sharlet, whose second book, The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power (Harper) was among the top five non-fiction books on The New York Times Bestseller list. This year Sharlet has been called upon by to discuss his investigative work with the media and has been a featured guest on “The Rachel Maddow Show” (nine appearances); “The Daily Show”; “Real Time with Bill Maher”; “Hardball”; CNN “Newsroom”; MSNBC “Big Picture”; and NPR’s “Fresh Air”; and “Democracy Now.” On the basis of that media attention he has sold two more books, C Street, which takes the historical story of “The Family” into the present, and What They Wanted, a collection of essays. C Street should hit bookstores next fall and What They Wanted will follow in the spring. This year, Sharlet also published Believer, Beware: First-Person Dispatches from the Margins of Faith (Beacon Press) an anthology of his literary magazine, “Killing the Buddha,” edited with Peter Manseau and two of his former NYU grad students, Meera Subramanian and Ashley Makar. This year, Jeff passes on editorial leadership of CRM’s online journal “The Revealer: a daily review of religion and the press” to Nicole Greenfield and Brigitte Sion (NYU).
Mission Statement
The Center for Religion and Media seeks to develop interdisciplinary, cross-cultural knowledge of how religious ideas and practices are shaped and spread through a variety of media. The Center, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a collaborative project of the Religious Studies Program; the Center for Media, Culture and History; and the Department of Journalism, providing a space for scholarly endeavor, a stage for public educational events, and an electronic interface with media specialists and the public through its innovative web magazine, The Revealer: A Daily Review of Religion and the Press (www.therevealer.org).

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Nam June Paik, TV Buddha, 1974, collection of Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam